



Destruction and hope in ex-Yugoslavia

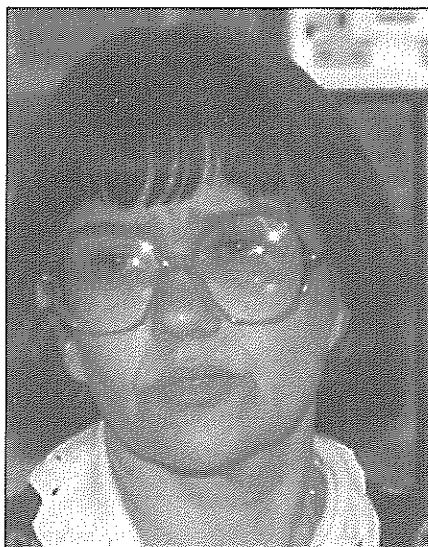
By Branka Magas

THE main reasons for continuing tensions in Bosnia-Herzegovina is the non-implementation of the civilian side of the Dayton Accords. Its military side — stopping the war — has been accomplished, but that is clearly not enough.

The civilian provisions of Dayton contain several important elements whose implementation is necessary if the country is to be reunited:

1. creating common Bosnian institutions;
2. return of the refugees to their homes;
3. arrest of war criminals and their delivery to the international war crimes tribunal in The Hague;
4. ensuring freedom of movement throughout the country;
5. economic reconstruction.

In these five crucial areas, implementation has been at best partial, at worst non-existent. War criminals, especially Radovan Karadzic, Ratko Mladic and Dario Kordic, have not been apprehended. Economic reconstruction is proceeding very slowly, which means that unemployment remains very high (over 80%) and the country cannot even begin to produce for itself. Freedom of movement is highly restricted and unsafe in all areas under the control of the so-called Republika Srpska or the Croat Military Council (HVO), so much so, the country



remains divided into three parts.

Even in some areas controlled by the Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina, there is intolerance towards the non-Muslim population. Not only can refugees (i.e. half of Bosnia's population) not go home, but more refugees are being created daily. It is estimated that some 150,000 extra people have been expelled from their homes since the signing of the Dayton agreement.

Finally, the central institutions exist only

on paper and are being sabotaged by the nationalist Serb and Croat leaders. These people have no interest in a functioning Bosnia-Herzegovina and will do anything they can to keep it partitioned.

The main culprits for the non-implementation of the civilian side of Dayton are Great Britain, France and the United States. They have lots of troops with great firepower on the ground, but pretend that creating a secure environment for the return of refugees or arresting war criminals are nothing to do with them.

More generally, the constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina forged in Dayton has reduced all politics to ethnicity and this is keeping the country divided. Thus in the entity called "Serb", Croats and Muslims have limited rights even in theory (in practice they have none) while in the other, called Croat-Muslim, the same holds true for Serbs. Given that, in addition, the central government is very weak (having no army, police or tax-raising powers of its own), it is difficult to see how Dayton Bosnia can ever work.

The British troops in Bosnia are centred on Banja Luka, which is an area where genocide has occurred in all its horror. Many of the people who organised concentration camps, mass rapes and systematic expulsion of the non-Serb population (including the destruc-

tion of all mosques and many Catholic churches) are now running municipal administrations. And the trouble is that the British troops, rather than arresting these criminals and sending them to The Hague, are co-operating with them and providing considerable economic assistance unconditionally. For example, in the town of Prijedor north-west of Banja Luka which is run by some of the most vicious war criminals, the British are helping to repair the infrastructure without obliging the local authorities to implement the civilian parts of Dayton. It is in principle very good, of course, to build hospitals and power stations, but it is not very good when these hospitals work on the principle of apartheid, and normalisation is used to cement the power of war criminals.

What socialists in this country should do is submit the actions of the British government in Bosnia-Herzegovina to very detailed scrutiny, in order to judge to what extent it is fulfilling the obligations towards Bosnia-Herzegovina into which (as one of the Contact Group countries) it entered at Dayton, as well as the obligations that flow from Britain's signature on such international treaties as the convention on genocide.

THE Serbian opposition has formed a coalition — Zajedno [Together]. Its strength was shown by the November 1996 municipal elections when it won most of the larger towns in Serbia, including Belgrade. Milosevic has tried to negate these victories, but this produced something that no one, least of all the Zajedno leaders, had predicted: a true popular revolt. This revolt was visible in the huge demonstrations held in Belgrade and other cities. As a result, and under Western pressure, Milosevic has been forced to concede defeat. Elections for the Serbian parliament and presidency are due to take place later on in the year and it is possible that control of the local administration will provide the Zajedno leaders with the kind of base necessary to defeat the ruling party and its president Slobodan Milosevic. The demonstrations have also convinced Western governments — including even the British, which up to now has been very supportive of the Serbian regime — that Milosevic should go.

As for the Croatian opposition, it has already proved itself as a real threat to the regime. It won in most of the towns at the last elections. Indeed, the ruling HDZ party is highly unpopular and unlikely to win the next elections.

But the opposition has not been able to capitalise on these successes and the government's general unpopularity (visible in a whole series of strikes). It has not been able as a result to provide a unified and effective political alternative. The large demonstration that followed the regime's attempt to silence

the popular Zagreb local Radio 101 came as a surprise to the opposition as well: in Croatia as in Serbia the mood of the masses is far more contestational than that of the opposition parties.

It is possible that the reintegration of the last part of the formerly occupied area still under UN control will create a better situation, from the point of view of anti-Tudjman forces. Tudjman is in any case mortally ill, so that the end of his regime is now in sight.

In my view the end of the current regimes in Serbia and Croatia will have a direct beneficial effect upon Bosnia's

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prospects. But there is a difference here between the two. Whereas the opposition in Croatia is not predominantly nationalistic and — like the Catholic Church — favours Bosnia's integration, this is not true for the Serbian Church and opposition.

Nevertheless, whoever comes after Milosevic will not be able to wield the same aggressive and concentrated power. Milosevic's regime has been based on complete control of the state and economy, and that will have to change if Serbia is to re-enter international financial institutions, which it needs to do in order to get the necessary credits. Serbia's economy is in a very bad state and facing collapse. Serbia, in addition, will soon have to tackle such difficult problems as what to do about the Albanian province of Kosovo, how to relate to its federal partner Montenegro, how to deal with the growing demand for autonomy coming from Vojvodina, and how to satisfy the national and human rights of the Bosniak population in Sandjak.

The area of former Yugoslavia can be stable, prosperous, peaceful and mutually cooperative only if the borders of the former republics and provinces are respected, and if Kosovo is given the right of self-determination. The extent of democracy, economic prosperity, social stability and international standing of both Serbia and Croatia have suffered greatly as a result of their aggression against Bosnia-Herzegovina. As for Kosovo, it is possible to imagine that in the first instance its autonomy will be restored, with it becoming a republic on a par with Serbia and Montenegro; and that then, after a fixed

period of time, the people in that republic will be allowed to decide their future through an internationally supervised referendum — very much like what happened in the case of Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. I wish to stress here that it is of the utmost importance that Macedonia's integrity be fully respected by all its neighbours.

Progress in Bosnia depends also on the emergence of political movements offering programmes which propose guarantees to every community that it will not be forcibly overwhelmed. It should be recalled, however, that the constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina before the war was precisely of that type: it ensured internal coherence of the country and harmonisation of the different communities' interests. War came to Bosnia not from within but from outside. All Bosnians of whatever ethnicity share the same interest: the right to return to their homes, to live safely, to be able to rebuild their villages, cities, their society and economy, so that they and their families have a normal future. This means that the internal borders created by war and genocide will have to be erased. There are already parties and political movements working to re-build Bosnia-Herzegovina in this way, and as time goes by their task will become easier, particularly if the neighbouring countries undergo this kind of democratic change of which I spoke earlier.

TRADER union activity in a country like Bosnia-Herzegovina — in which the economy is working at something like one-tenth of its pre-war capacity and unemployment is around 80% — is difficult and specific. At the same time, given the arrested development of political parties, trade unions will have to do something of their work as well. In Serbia itself, the unemployment is huge and growing: now that the war is over the regime is massively sacking workers, while those who continue in their jobs have lost all their previous (albeit nominal) legal rights. Serbia as well as Bosnia-Herzegovina will soon be undergoing the process known as “privatisation” and it is important that the workers join together in order to be part of the solution.

As Bosnia heals and its neighbours democratise, i.e. the situation becomes more stable and normal (so that, for example you can travel without fear of arrest or loss of life), it will be trade unions in the first instance that will articulate workers' needs, of which international solidarity is one. The whole of the former Yugoslav area (with the partial exception of Slovenia) is devastated and impoverished. It will be impossible to change this situation qualitatively for the better unless workers throughout the area establish firm links of mutual solidarity.